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READING FOR PLEASURE

Adventures in Reading, 24th Series

By

MARY CUTLER HOPKINS



CHAPEL HILL

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Adventures in Reading, Twenty-fourth Series

By

MARY CUTLER HOPKINS

University of North Carolina Library



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THIS WAS AMERICA

In 1827 a bustling, wasp-tongued little Englishwoman emigrated to America, hoping to make a fortune for herself and her family in the New World. The Moorish-Egyptian bazaar she built in Cincinnati was a failure, but the book, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, written on her return to England, made Frances Trollope famous on both sides of the Atlantic. The latest and best of its numerous editions has been handsomely published by Knopf.

To Mrs. Trollope, America was a crude, barbaric, unlovely land, inhabited by boorish men and bilious "females". She was equally affronted by the dreariness of social life, the incessant spitting of the American male, and the pigs that rooted in the streets of Cincinnati. And she expressed her opinions with such tart vigor that they were received by American readers with mixed emotions of hilarity and rage. A hundred years have not dimmed the malicious sparkle of *Domestic Manners*. The reporting was accurate, though the essential spirit of the lusty young democracy eluded the author's doggedly British mind. And the modern reader interested in the past, will find it a fascinating picture of our adolescent society.

By 1861 our domestic manners had greatly improved, and even Mrs. Trollope would have been favorably impressed by Mary Boykin Chesnut, whose *Diary From Dixie* is a witty and delightful account of Southern life during the Civil War years. Although she was deeply conscious of the tragedy that the war was bringing to her country and her people, she wrote with so much spirit that the tone of her book is one of gallant courage rather than despair.

Mrs. Chesnut, wife of a South Carolina planter, knew most of the leaders of the Confederate Government and the Confederate Army, as well as the members of the local aristocracy and their Negroes. An intelligent, well-informed woman, as well as a warm hearted, unusually charming one, she wrote an intimate record of her time that is more enthralling than any historical novel. Mrs. Chesnut was interested above all in people, and the pages of her diary are crowded with men and women who seem amazingly contemporary in their speech and behavior.

1. THE PRE-EMILY POST ERA

Domestic Manners of the Americans, by Frances Trollope

Give a brief summary of Mrs. Trollope's travels in the United States. Mention some of her comments on various parts of the country, and on her fellow travellers.

Discuss the author's comments on the manners and customs of her day. Do you feel that she may have been exaggerating?

Discuss various aspects of the American scene in the early 19th century; the theatre, steam boat travel, revival meetings, boarding house life, etc., as seen through the author's eyes.

Why do you suppose Mrs. Trollope saw only the disagreeable aspects of American life?

If possible, compare *Domestic Manners of the Americans* with Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*.

What is it about Mrs. Trollope's style that makes her book so entertaining after more than a hundred years?

Additional Reading:

Life On The Mississippi, by Mark Twain

2. A LADY OF THE CONFEDERACY

A Diary From Dixie, by Mary Boykin Chesnut

Discuss the everyday life on a plantation during the Civil War, and the changes the war years brought.

Compare the Southern women of Mary Chesnut's time to the women of today.

Discuss Mrs. Chesnut's attitude toward the North and President Lincoln. Compare with her feeling for the Confederacy.

Discuss the institution of slavery as seen through the eyes of the author and her friends.

Bring out in your review the value of documents like the *Diary From Dixie* and *Domestic Manners of the Americans* to historians, novelists and the general public.

Additional Reading:

The Woman Who Rang the Bell, by Phillips Russell

THE HUMAN COMEDY

John Mason Brown, drama critic and associate editor on the *Saturday Review of Literature*, has written a book of short pieces—we used to call them informal essays—on bringing up two lively little boys. And any parent, on reading *Morning Faces*, will recognize many of his own amusing and often harrowing experiences in these sketches of life among the Browns. There is the birthday party, a bedlam of “shiny toys, screams of delight, little boys, the rat-tat-tat of a machine gun and the smells of a new chemistry set already in use”; the train trip, “Parents may rail at comics to the limit of their lungs in private or at meetings of the P.-T. A., but there are moments, and a train trip is nothing but a succession of these, when comics are a father’s and mother’s best friend”; and then there was the evening when father tried to read *Treasure Island* aloud to two little boys who were wild to get away and listen to the Lone Ranger.

In a series of episodes that are at once funny and touching, the author has captured the essence of a happy family relationship; of experiences that father and sons may share in common; of the fleeting hours of childhood, seen through the eyes of a loving and remarkably patient father.

Seventy-seven of Robert Benchley’s choicer pieces have been reprinted in *Chips Off the Old Benchley*. Unlike *Morning Faces*, this collection of brief essays has no central theme. The author copes with a fantastic variety of subjects; *Picking French Pastry*; *a Harder Game Than Chess*; *Are You an Old Master?*; *Future Man: Tree or Mammal*; and a host of other Benchleyisms.

One of the great humorists of his time, Benchley’s writing reflects a tolerant, kindly spirit. His wit illuminates the vanities and follies of his world, but it is never a cruel wit. There is no sting in the picture of the suburbanite struggling to raise a garden, the businessman, cowed by his efficient secretary as he fumblingly dictates a letter, or the baffled parent helping Junior with the homework that differs so radically from the homework of Father’s day.

I. THEIR HEARTS WERE YOUNG AND GAY

Morning Faces, by John Mason Brown

Discuss briefly the author and his other writings.

Do you feel that the book has a universal appeal; that children living in a New York apartment are very much like children anywhere? Is the attitude of the parents typical of intelligent and loving parents?

Read aloud your favorite passage, and show how the author writes with complete simplicity, yet manages to bring his subjects to life, and to create just the right atmosphere.

Comment on the underlying pathos of many of the scenes.

Discuss the author's comments on the relationship of parents and children, in the last three pages of the book. Do you feel that what he has to say is important to all parents?

Do you find that the illustrations add to the effectiveness of the text? If possible, let your audience look at the pictures.

Additional Reading:

That's Me All Over, by Cornelia Otis Skinner

One Man's Meat, by Elwin Brooks White

2. ENJOYMENT OF LAUGHTER

Chips Off the Old Benchley, by Robert Benchley

Sketch Robert Benchley's career, and discuss his status as one of the leading American humorists of his day.

Show how American life in the Twenties and Thirties is illustrated in these sketches. Will historians of the future find them enlightening or bewildering?

Compare Benchley's work as humorist and social critic with that of Dickens, George Ade, Stephen Leacock, or any others that may occur to you.

Read aloud your favorite passages, and comment on them. Do you feel that they have a universal appeal? Will they be more amusing to men than to women, to city or to country dwellers?

Discuss Benchley's character as it is brought out in his writing; his tolerance, his non-aggressiveness, his dislike for birds, flowers, and other aspects of nature, and so on.

Is Benchley your idea of the "typical New Yorker"?

Mention the illustrations by Gluyas Williams, and their contribution to the text. Show them to the audience if possible.

Additional Reading:

The Beast In Me, by James Thurber

Leacock Roundabout, by Stephen Leacock

LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY

The rich pageantry of an ancient civilization comes to life before our eyes in the pages of Mika Waltari's *The Egyptian*. The story of the physician Sinuhe takes the reader from the Golden House of the young Pharaoh Akhenaton through all classes of society, down to the outcasts who embalm the bodies of the dead. And in his wanderings, the doctor passes through cities and kingdoms whose names have long been familiar through the reading of the Old Testament—Thebes, its harbor crowded with red sails, the rich cities of Babylon and Syria, the country of the warlike Hittites, and the highly complex, highly sophisticated land of Egypt.

As in most historical novels the characters are puppets, who move through the dramatic, often sensational scenes as the author pulls the strings. But Waltari has done so much careful research, and has written with such honest attention to detail, that he has achieved a most convincing picture of a long dead world. This world knew social struggle and the struggle between the supporters of conflicting ideas and philosophies of life. And in reading a thoughtfully written historical novel, some of the conflicting ideas of our own time seem to be brought out in a new light.

Only a writer thoroughly familiar with ancient Jewish lore could have written the story of the mother of Jesus with the depth of understanding shown by Sholem Asch. In *Mary*, the author follows the outline of the New Testament story from the Nativity to the Resurrection, filling in the Gospel narrative from his wide knowledge of traditional Jewish customs and beliefs. The relationship of Jesus with His parents is described with imagination and great warmth, and His story, seen through the mother's eyes, seems new and fresh. Mr. Asch, a writer of real talent and substantial scholarship, has written a novel that is at once reverent, credible, and of literary merit.

I. IN THE DAYS OF THE PHARAOHS

The Egyptian, by Mika Waltari

Give a brief account of Sinuhe's travels, describing each important place with quotations from the text.

Discuss the social background of the story.

Compare the philosophy of Pharaoh Akhenaton with that of the soldier Horemheb.

Discuss some of the principal characters. Do they seem convincing to you as people? Are they less alive than the characters in *Mary*? Why?

Describe the customs, the clothes, the houses and public buildings, and any other details that bring the period to life for the reader.

Do you feel that the sensational elements of some of the scenes add or detract from the value of the book?

Additional Reading:

Prince of Egypt, by Dorothy C. Wilson

2. THE MOTHER

Mary, by Sholem Asch

Mention the two earlier books of Sholem Asch's trilogy; *The Nazarene* and *The Apostle*, and tell something about the author.

Describe the Jewish customs of family, community, and religious life as they are used by the author to supplement the narrative.

Discuss the way in which the supernatural aspects of the story are presented.

Compare the novel with the account of Mary's life as given in the Gospels.

Do you feel that the author has taken any unjustified liberties with the original version?

Do you feel that this book has added to your understanding of the life and times of Jesus?

Additional Reading:

The New Testament

The Nazarene, by Sholem Asch

THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELTS

Already, in the few short years since the president's death, the Roosevelts have become a part of American folklore, so that their essential qualities as human beings are almost obscured by the legend. In her book, *This I Remember*, Eleanor Roosevelt writes with great honesty and warmth about her husband "as an individual," about herself and the children, and their crowded, colorful life in Washington.

Although the principal interest of the book lies in the illumination of the two main figures, its pages are filled with the details of everyday life in the White House, and of the men and women who came and went during those busy, exciting years of depression, recovery, and war.

F.D.R., My Boss, by Grace Tully, is not a book of permanent literary value, but it does give us an absorbing picture of another facet of the president's personality. Miss Tully, who was Mr. Roosevelt's secretary, shows us the Chief Executive who dictated his message to Congress on December eighth 1941, without pause or correction, as well as the very human man who loved mystery stories and had trouble figuring his income tax.

These personal memoirs, readable, intimate, and non-professional, so to speak, have a certain value that even the most scholarly historical works cannot attain. The authors have written books that could not have been written by anyone else, since they have drawn their material from their own experience and knowledge, and flavored it with their own highly personal emotions.

1. PERSONAL HISTORY

This I Remember, by Eleanor Roosevelt

Discuss the family life of the Roosevelts and how it was affected by politics, and the growing strain of the war years.

Discuss Mr. Roosevelt's character in his relationships with his mother, his wife and his children.

Describe the visits to the White House of some of the great figures of the day; the British royal family, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, Mr. Churchill and others.

After reading the book, how important a part do you think Mrs. Roosevelt had in her husband's official life?

What were Mr. Roosevelt's religious beliefs, as described by his wife?

After reading *This I Remember* did you change your opinions of the Roosevelts. Why?

2. A HERO TO HIS SECRETARY

F.D.R., My Boss, by Grace Tully

Sketch the personal life of Mr. Roosevelt as seen through the eyes of his secretary.

Discuss Mr. Roosevelt's attitude toward his political opponents; Herbert Hoover, Wendell Willkie, and Thomas E. Dewey.

Discuss Miss Tully's attitude toward the president. Was it blind hero-worship, or did her daily association with him make her a credible witness?

Contrast famous persons seen through the eyes of the secretary, with the same people as they appeared to Mrs. Roosevelt when they were entertained at the White House.

What were Miss Tully's impressions of the other members of the Roosevelt family?

Discuss the importance of these personal memoirs to historians and students.

Additional Reading:

This Is My Story, by Eleanor Roosevelt

The Roosevelt I Knew, by Frances Perkins

Roosevelt and Hopkins, by Robert Sherwood

SOUTHERN YESTERDAYS

The collapse of Lee's army on the fateful retreat from Petersburg to Appomattox is the background of *Eight April Days*, a first novel by an author who was born "within hollering distance" of the road down which the starving, desperate men made their way in the spring of '65.

Against this heroic setting two couples play out their own personal dramas; Judith Crosland, the Yankee wife of a Confederate captain, and her husband, Old Pine, the peddler woman, big, loud-mouthed and utterly devoted to the Southern cause, and her man, Mr. Baker, a scared little convalescent soldier, whom she is trying to force back into the army. Through the eyes of these four people we see the tragedy of the defeat; the confusion, the desperate courage, and the incredulous grief of the defeated.

Although the style is sometimes over-theatrical and the characters not always entirely convincing, the author's thorough knowledge of his theme gives reality to his picture of these last few days of the war.

No wars or rumors of wars disturb the Southern scene in Anne Goodwin Winslow's *It Was Like This*. The story is written with such restraint, such quiet simplicity, that the reader is almost unaware of the admirable craftsmanship that gives this novel its rare quality.

When Hugh Martin comes home to the Gulf-coast plantation for a visit, he realizes that he is still in love with Anna, the gentle, innocent, beautiful wife of his brother. To Hugh she is all poetry and enchantment, while to Lawrence she is a companion and friend, and an invaluable assistant in managing the farm. It is the relationship between these three, and the slow almost bewildered development of Anna into maturity, that supply the plot, with the dreamy beauty of the Mississippi country as the background.

1. THE ROAD TO APPOMATTOX

Eight April Days, by Scott Hart

Sketch the historical background; the retreat, the failure of supplies, the failure to make contact with General Johnson's army, the action of the Union Army.

Discuss the principal characters in the book. Do you think of them as real people, or merely as "characters"?

Do you sympathize with Judith Crosland, or do you feel that her betrayal of her husband was unforgivable?

Which seems more interesting and important to you, the larger drama of the retreat, or the personal dramas of the Croslands and of Old Pine and Mr. Baker?

Discuss the humor in scenes with Mr. Baker, Piggy Biggs, and some of the common soldiers. Do you feel that it serves to relieve the tension in an otherwise tragic story?

Does the book make a real contribution to our understanding of the last few days of the Civil War?

Additional Reading:

Lee's Lieutenants, by Douglas Southall Freeman, Volume III, pages 675-752.

2. A MISSISSIPPI IDYLL

It Was Like This, by Anne Goodwin Winslow

Very little actually happens in the novel, but a great deal is suggested, and it is this under-the-surface drama that so fascinates the reader.

Discuss the principal characters and trace the family relationships that would have resulted in a dramatic crisis in the hands of a writer of less restraint.

Describe the life on the plantation; the place, the time, the activities of the various members of the family.

What are some of the details that indicate that the story takes place at the turn of the century?

Read aloud some of the passages in which Hugh speculates on life and art, on leisure and monotony. Do you feel that these casual passages of philosophy add to the value of the book?

Compare the author's controlled writing with the bold, noisy style of *Eight April Days*. Do you think the latter might have been a better novel if Mr. Hart had written with more restraint, or does his subject call for a more violent treatment?

Additional Reading:

Delta Wedding, by Eudora Welty

A Lost Lady, by Willa Cather

The Springs, by Anne Goodwin Winslow

THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE

Perhaps it is a sign of our uncertain times that two of the most powerful novels of 1949 are prophecies of things to come. Neither picture is a pleasant one, but each author has developed his theme with such relentless logic that the reader is completely convinced as he reads.

George Orwell, in his *Nineteen Eighty-four*, describes the world of the super-states that arises after the third great war. Except for a select group of Inner Party members, the population is made up of slaves whose very thoughts are directed by an elaborate system of controls and who live drab and miserably uncomfortable lives—victims of a society whose single purpose is the destruction of individual identity. In the figure of the hero, Winston Smith, we see the ordinary little man who makes a desperate attempt to be free to live and love and think as a man, only to be utterly crushed by the all-seeing, all-powerful state. The political axiom, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely", is the essential theme of this most significant novel.

In *Earth Abides*, by George R. Stewart, the human race has been almost completely destroyed by a mysterious epidemic, possibly a weapon of biological warfare that has got out of hand. The few survivors form little colonies, living like parasites on the old civilization and finding their food, clothing and weapons on the shelves of deserted shops. The knowledge and skills of the old world are gradually forgotten. But the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the original survivors develop skills and knowledge that will, perhaps, create a new civilization on the ruins of the old.

1. IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

Nineteen Eighty-four, by George Orwell

Describe the everyday life of an ordinary citizen of "Oceania"—the food, clothing, dwellings, recreation, and family relationships.

Show how the thoughts as well as the actions of the people could be effectively controlled by the state.

Discuss the new official language, Newspeak—its construction and its purpose.

Why does the state find it necessary to carry on continual warfare with one of the other great super-states? Do you find any parallel in the world-politics of today?

What is the motive behind the actions of the Inner Party? Do you find it convincing?

Do you feel that *Nineteen Eighty-four* gives a believable picture of a possible future, or is it a piece of clever but distorted propaganda?

Additional Reading:

Animal Farm, by George Orwell

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley

2. WE BEGIN AGAIN

Earth Abides, by George R. Stewart

How does the author handle the non-human aspects of his story? Describe the fate of the wild and the domestic animals.

Describe the disintegration of man-made objects; buildings, machinery, water and electric power stations, etc.

Are the characters of the novel interesting as individuals, or is the reader interested mainly in the theme?

Is the behavior of the survivors logical? What do you think you would do under such circumstances?

If civilization were destroyed by the hydrogen bomb, or by biological warfare, do you think the results would be much as Mr. Stewart pictures them here?

Additional Reading:

Storm, by George R. Stewart

The Hopkins Manuscript, by Robert C. Sherriff

SHORT STORY HARVEST

The thirty-first annual edition of the *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories* is a cross section of current fiction by American authors. Considered by the judges who chose the stories to be one of the best of the series for the past decade, the book includes the cream of the magazine crop. William Faulkner and Mark Van Doren, winners of the first and second prizes, are seasoned writers, but many of the selections are by comparatively newcomers to the literary field. These younger writers, who have lived through the worst depression and the worst war in history, will set the tone for the kind of writing we may expect in the next ten or fifteen years. So far, the disillusioned, hard-boiled school of the nineteen twenties has not been duplicated. The realism of the younger writers is often touched with compassion, and in several of these selections the narrative is pure allegory, or has allegorical implications.

Fifty-five Stories from the New Yorker is a selection of stories that have appeared in that magazine since 1940. During the war and post-war years, many major American writers have made their first appearances in the pages of the *New Yorker*, and the collection reflects the historical background as well as the literary trends of the era. Whether there is a "New Yorker formula" for the short story, as some critics insist, the standards of writing are high. There is a precision, a skillful economy in these stories that the student of writing would do well to study.

THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY

Prize Stories of 1949, the O. Henry Awards, edited by Herschel Brickell
Fifty-five Short Stories From the New Yorker

Read the introduction to *Prize Stories of 1949*, and discuss the factors upon which the judges based their decisions.

Do the stories seem to you too arty, or do you feel that they accurately reflect the modern world?

Select one of the three prize-winning stories to discuss fully. Give a brief resumé, and give the judges' reasons for selecting it. Do you agree with the selection? Why?

What basis is there for saying that the *New Yorker* stories are written to a formula? Do you think this criticism is justified?

Discuss the various types of narratives found in these two volumes; the regional stories, stories of childhood, the allegories, and so on.

After reading the two collections of short stories, does it seem to you that a distinct new type of postwar fiction, such as appeared after the first world war, is developing?

Additional Reading:

The Best American Short Stories of 1949, edited by Martha Foley

The Short Story, by Kenneth Payson Kempton

"THIS EARTH, THIS REALM, THIS ENGLAND"

Out of her love for the Devon country, and her knowledge of the legends and folklore of that region, Elizabeth Goudge has written a novel with all the unreality and charm of a fairy tale. *Gentian Hill* is set in the time of the Napoleonic wars, when the people on the west coast of England lived in constant expectation of invasion from the continent. But war is only a distant background to the quiet, almost dreamlike story of two lost children of noble birth, a French priest who had escaped the Terror, and the Devonshire farmers among whom the three found refuge.

As in all good fairy tales, there are elements of cruelty and evil, supplied in this case by descriptions of the horrors of English slums and prisons, and of the wretched lives of the sailors on English ships of the period. But life in the country is pictured as a rustic idyl of sturdy British farmers in their thatched cottages and the gentry in their lovely eighteenth century houses, all living in an intimate relationship with the sea and the soil. Long after the details of the story have been forgotten, the reader will remember the wassailing at Christmas, the old countryman singing his ancient ploughing chant as he drives his oxen, and many other colorful bits of Devon lore.

Theodore Bonnet's book, *The Mudlark*, with London and Windsor Castle as its setting, is an interesting contrast to *Gentian Hill*. Based on an actual incident, this is the story of a ragged waif who falls through a coalhole at the castle and wanders into the dining room where Mr. Disraeli is dining with Queen Victoria. The social and political results of the accidental meeting of slum child and sovereign furnish the theme of this half fanciful, half historical novel. But the author's main interest is in reproducing the atmosphere of mid-Victorian England; prosperous, secure, slightly smug, and just remote enough to seem romantic to twentieth century eyes.

1. "THIS OTHER EDEN"

Gentian Hill, by Elizabeth Goudge

Sketch the historical background of the novel. Compare the attitude of the English people toward the threat of invasion with their attitude in World War II.

Discuss the social background of the story. If possible, read *Jane Austen*, by Elizabeth Jenkins, for its excellent picture of English life in this period.

Describe some of the old pagan customs that survived in Devonshire from Saxon times.

Discuss the supernatural element in the story.

Are the characters convincing as people? Do you think the author meant them to be?

Do you feel that *Gentian Hill*, in its plot, characterization, and style, is closer to Nineteenth Century than to present-day fashions in writing?

Additional Reading:

Jane Austen, by Elizabeth Jenkins

2. "THIS ROYAL THRONE OF KINGS"

The Mudlark, by Theodore Bonnet

Tell a little about the author; how and where he wrote the book.

Sketch the historical background of *The Mudlark*, and the political aspects of the story.

Read *Victoria of England*, by Edith Sitwell, for its picture of the social conditions of the period. Discuss the social scene of the novel.

Discuss the characters of Queen Victoria, Disraeli, and Brown, as they are brought out in the story. Read aloud passages that illustrate your points.

Describe life in Windsor Castle, from the Queen's apartments to the servant's hall.

Do you feel that the love story, and the story of Wheeler are over-shadowed by too much digression and detail, or do you think that the value of the book lies in the over-all picture of the era?

Additional Reading:

Disraeli, by Andre Maurois

Queen Victoria, by Lytton Strachey

The Reign of Queen Victoria, by Hector Bolitho

Victoria of England, by Edith Sitwell

TWO BRILLIANT NEW AUTHORS

It may a symptom of our sick society that the first novels of two new writers of great promise have as their theme the sterility of the modern spirit. The characters in both books are well-to-do American intellectuals, who move without faith, humor, or moral courage in a world that has no meaning.

A Long Day's Dying, by Frederick Buechner, is the story of a charming widow who goes to visit her son at college, has a brief affair with one of his instructors, and in her attempt to conceal the truth, involves her friends and family in an emotional turmoil. Although the plot is not entirely credible, the distinction of style, the wealth of symbolism, and the subtle play of one character upon another make this a truly remarkable first novel.

The French Existentialists have an American disciple in Paul Bowles, whose *Sheltering Sky* has all the horrid fascination of a nightmare. It is a study of disintegrating personality, set in the squalor, decadence, and mystery of the Sahara. To Kit and Port Moresby life is literally "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Obsessed with strange fears and nameless problems, they try to find escape through travel. But in North Africa where the very atmosphere suggests the moral atmosphere of their own lives, their destruction is rapid and complete. To many readers who have actual problems and real troubles to face, the mindless struggles of the Moresbys will seem irritating and even absurd. But the literary skill of the author, the powerful descriptions, the building up of horror upon horror, make *The Sheltering Sky* one of the outstanding novels of its kind.

1. "A TANGLED WEB"

A Long Day's Dying, by Frederick Buechner

Discuss the setting of the novel. Read aloud a passage or two, to illustrate the author's skill in creating atmosphere.

Do you feel that the actions of the main characters are meant to be realistic, or are they symbolic of the moral confusion of our time?

Discuss further the symbolism of the novel. What is the significance of the monkey? Of the German servant?

Discuss the author's style; its elegance, precision, and the skillful use of words. If possible, compare with one of the novels of Henry James or Virginia Woolf.

Additional Reading:

Mrs. Dalloway, by Virginia Woolf

What Maisie Knew, by Henry James

2. "STRANGER AND AFRAID"

The Sheltering Sky, by Paul Bowles

Describe the North African setting.

Discuss the two main characters. What was their purpose in coming to Africa, and how does the desert affect them?

How does Tunner, the one normal character in the book, help push the Moresbys over the edge of sanity?

Discuss the author's style. Select passages to read aloud to show his skill in creating suspense, and in building up a sinister atmosphere.

Give a brief discussion of Existentialism, and show how *The Sheltering Sky* belongs to this school.

Show how books like *A Long Day's Dying* and *The Sheltering Sky* interpret our time, and could only have been written in our time.

In spite of their repellent subjects both of these books are intensely moral, since no sermon could illustrate more effectively the despair and loneliness of lost souls.

Additional Reading:

Age of Reason, by Jean-Paul Sartre

“AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY”

All the warmth and charm of simple goodness is personified in India Severn, the heroine of Margaret Landon's *Never Dies the Dream*. India lives quite literally by the Golden Rule, and her mission school has become a refuge for the unwanted children and bewildered adults who have come to her for help. In the eyes of the other missionaries in Siam, she is an impractical dreamer, and her school disgracefully unconventional. But her story, told without any obvious moralizing, is a testament of faith, the picture of a small, clear light in a dark world.

The drama of India and her protégés is set in the modern city of Bangkok, and the reader is vividly aware of the damp close heat, the over-luxuriant vegetation, and the crowded, noisy streets that surround the mission. The many characters, Siamese and American, are well drawn, and the story, in spite of its exotic setting, achieves reality.

In Mary Ellen Chase's *The Plum Tree*, Emma Davis, the dumpy, middle-aged trained nurse who helps run a Home for Aged Women, has this same quality or radiant goodness. Years of hard work, surrounded by suffering and death, have not blunted her humanity. And beneath the stiff white uniform is an eager, loving spirit.

On the lawn in front of the Home a plum tree in full bloom shimmers in the morning sun, a symbol of youth and joy, while inside, the nurses face a day of crisis. Three of the old ladies, who have been slipping from eccentricity to madness, are to be committed that day, and Emma, with an instinctive perception of what it means to be old and lonely and afraid, is determined to make the hours before their departure as happy as possible. In this simple story about obscure, quite ordinary people, Miss Chase has illustrated the power of that quality Saint Paul called charity.

1. A TESTAMENT OF FAITH

Never Dies the Dream, by Margaret Landon

Describe the city of Bangkok and the life of the people, as seen through India's eyes.

Describe Jasmine Hall and the life there.

Why was India's school considered unsatisfactory by the other missionaries? Do you feel that their criticism was natural and justified according to conventional standards?

The Princess Sandhya is one of the most interesting characters in the book. Show how she stubbornly opposes the encroachments of Western civilization.

Discuss the relationship between India and the other Americans in the story.

Discuss India's religious faith. Was her work actually a failure or did she win an intangible, spiritual victory?

Read aloud passages from the last two pages in which India sums up her achievements, and attains self-knowledge.

Additional Reading:

Anna and the King of Siam, by Margaret Landon

Out of My Life and Thought, by Albert Schweitzer

2. "NUNG DIMITTIS"

The Plum Tree, by Mary Ellen Chase

What does the plum tree mean to Emma Davis?

Describe the Home for Aged Women, and the people who live there.

Show how the author, writing an economical, deceptively simple prose, reveals the personalities and the past histories of her characters.

Discuss the facets of Emma's character as brought out in the story; her refusal to wear glasses because her eyes are her best feature, her desire to travel, her resolution to read the Complete Shakespeare.

Describe the three old ladies and their pathetic tea party.

Select a passage to read aloud that will convey something of the special quality of the book.

Additional Reading:

The Old Ladies, by Hugh Walpole

ARTISTS AND BABBITTS

Daphne Du Maurier, daughter of an actor and wife of an English peer, is at home in the fantastic world of the theatre as well as in the formal, conventional setting of upper class British society. In *The Parasites* she tells the story of a family of artists, reckless, erratic and gifted, in conflict with the correct, conservative world about them. A series of flashbacks shows the Delaneys as children, travelling over Europe with their famous parents, as far from the everyday life of everyday people as creatures from another planet. Theirs had been a world of backstage; of hotels and resorts; of Paris in the spring and Rome in the winter, with a tour of America always in the offing. The Delaneys grown up, are never quite at home in the colorless atmosphere of postwar England. And Maria's marriage to a country gentleman, heir to a title and a great estate, precipitates the clash between the two ways of life that is the theme of this romantic, highly readable novel.

The artist in relation to the everyday world is also the theme of Cleveland Amory's *Home Town*, but the tone is cheerfully satirical rather than romantic. Mitchell Hickok, a simple, amiable young man from Copper City, Arizona, has written a book that is to be published by Hathaway House. No one at Hathaways has actually read the book, and no one is interested in Mitchell as a person. But an elaborate and utterly meretricious publicity campaign is worked out to "sell" the new author to his prospective public. The average reader, who has never suspected that literature might be simply merchandise to "the trade", or that authors are sometimes promoted like movie stars, will be both shocked and amused, and will be inclined to read book reviews, jacket blurbs, and publisher's advertisements with a newly skeptical eye.

1. THE ARTIST AT ODDS WITH SOCIETY

The Parasites, by Daphne Du Maurier

Sketch briefly the author's career and mention her earlier books. Show how her own background furnished material for *The Parasites*.

Describe postwar Europe as seen through the eyes of the travelling Delaneys.

Comment on the contrast between the conservative county society of the Wyndhams, and the Bohemianism of the Delaneys.

Do you think Charles is accurate when he calls the Delaneys parasites?

Discuss the leading characters. Do you find them convincing?

Do you think the character of Mama may have been based on that of Isadora Duncan?

This is not a great novel, but it is a very readable one. Can you analyze the qualities that hold and charm the reader?

Read *The Constant Nymph*, by Margaret Kennedy, and compare the two novels.

Additional Reading:

Gerald, by Daphne Du Maurier

The Constant Nymph, by Margaret Kennedy

2. AUTHORS AND OTHER PEOPLE

Home Town, by Cleveland Amory

Give a brief sketch of the author's career, and mention his earlier book, *The Proper Bostonians*.

Describe Copper City and its people.

Discuss the character of Mitchell Hickok. How does he affect the New Yorkers and how do the New Yorkers affect Mitchell?

Describe the various publicity stunts that were planned for Mitchell.

Read a passage aloud, and comment on the author's style; on his skill as a satirist.

Describe the atmosphere at Hathaway House. Do you feel that there is probably a good deal of truth in Mr. Amory's picture of the publishing business? Were you amused, disillusioned, or both?

Additional Reading:

The Proper Bostonians, by Cleveland Amory

LIVING IN TWO WORLDS

The Harper Prize for 1950 was awarded to Max Steele for his novel *Debby*, the strangely appealing story of a woman who has the heart and mind of a good child. Debby lives in a world in which fancy and reality are forever blending, but like the "simple" characters of folklore, she has a sort of earthy wisdom that carries her through situations that are too complex for her limited mind to understand. As nursemaid and general servant in the Merrill household, Debby is a delightful companion to the younger children, a source of intense embarrassment to the adolescent daughter, and a burden as well as a help to earnest, hardworking Mrs. Merrill. This story of a middle class Southern family in the twenties and thirties, seen through Debby's eyes, is at once funny and pathetic. The characters are drawn with delicate perception, and the action is undramatic and quietly realistic.

In *Laurel*, by Alice Fellows, we have another heroine who lives apart from reality. But Elizabeth's detachment is deliberate, the disdain of a proud, egotistical spirit for a world in which she feels that she has been denied her rightful place. Elizabeth's father is the son of poor farmers, a brilliant lawyer but a self-made man, and her mother is never able to forget or to let her children forget that she has lost caste by her marriage. Growing up in a bitterly divided household, longing for the love and approval of her mother that is wholly given to her younger brother, Elizabeth becomes obsessed with her dream of Laurel, the old home of her mother's family. She holds herself aloof from the normal, small town life about her, determined to identify herself with the vanishing aristocracy of a vanished era.

1. THE YOUNG IN SPIRIT

Debby, by Max Steele

Tell a little about the author, and about the Harper Prize.

Describe Debby, her appearance and her character. Do you feel that she is a real person?

The other characters in the book are all seen through Debby's eyes, and with childlike honesty she sees them as they really are. Comment on Mrs. Merrill and the children, and on the family relationships.

Comment on the comic scenes in the book. They are extremely funny, and yet they have an underlying pathos.

How is the era of the 1920's and the 1930's indicated in the novel?

Glenway Wescott says that *Debby* has a "theme of great human significance". Comment on this statement.

Additional Reading:

Portrait of Jennie, by Robert Nathan

2. THE LOST BIRTHRIGHT

Laurel, by Alice Fellows

Describe the family relationships of the Cramers.

Discuss the contrasting backgrounds of the Cramers and the Courtneys. Do you feel that they are realistically drawn?

Show how Elizabeth's identification with her mother's people dominates her whole life.

How does Parry escape the family blight that destroys his mother and sister?

This is the study of an old culture that must die to make way for the new. Show how Elizabeth longed for a way of life that was no longer economically possible.

Laurel is the work of a twenty-two year old girl. Do you feel that she has genuine talent?

Additional Reading:

The Little Foxes, by Lillian Hellman

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